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ABSTRACT

The editors of "Practical Application of Research (PAR)," a newsletter of Phi Beta Kappa's Center on Evaluation, Development, and Research, reviewed all of the research done since 1971 on the subject of instructional clarity. Instructional clarity was defined as the interaction between what a teacher does or says and the student's perception of that behavior. This summary of the PAR findings lists 11 specific behaviors of elementary teachers with good instructional clarity that were identified by students. The behaviors include making sure that explanations are clear and understood, providing adequate practice time, synthesizing ideas and demonstrating relevancy, adjusting teaching to the learner and continuously monitoring students, emphasizing important ideas, and demonstrating a high degree of verbal fluency. For teachers who want to increase their instructional clarity, it is suggested that they tape-record and analyze their instructions for a lesson. Four impediments to instructional clarity are described: fillers; vague or garbled instructions; inaudible pitch; and mazes (combinations of the three previous impediments). Examples are provided of the right way and the wrong way to introduce a lesson. (DC)

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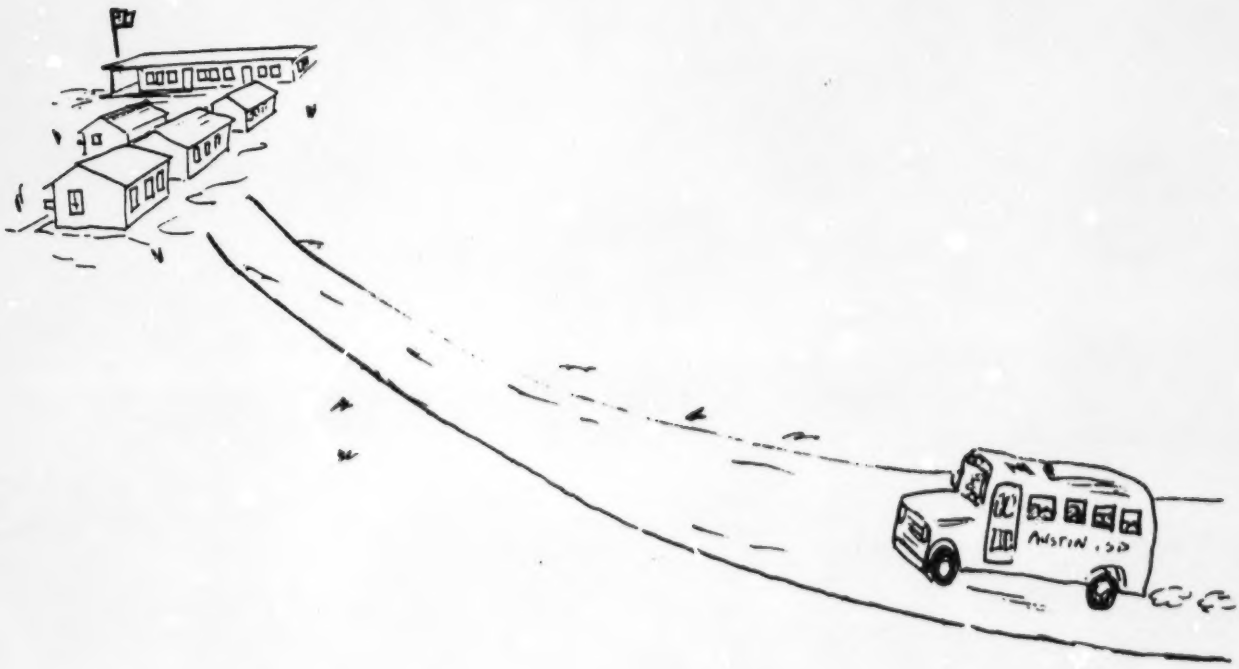
TURNING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE



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INSTRUCTIONAL CLARITY

Research has consistently found instructional clarity to be associated with student achievement. No one is able to be "perfectly clear" 100% of the time, but everyone should try to be as clear as possible as often as possible in order to promote student learning.

This issue of TRIP will explore research in this area. Studies have used open-ended questionnaires, teacher interviews, and teacher observations in an attempt to find out: a) if students and teachers perceive the instructions given by the teacher as clear and comprehensive; and b) how instructional clarity promotes better teaching and student achievement.

What Exactly Does "Instructional Clarity" Mean?

The editors of PAR (Practical Application of Research) reviewed all of the research done since 1971 on instructional clarity. They found that instructional clarity seemed to be an interaction involving at least two things--WHAT A TEACHER DOES OR SAYS AND THE STUDENT'S PERCEPTION OF THOSE BEHAVIORS. Based on students' perceptions, elementary teachers with good clarity tend to:

- Explain clearly work to be done and provide illustrations or examples.
- Ask students before they start work if they know what to do and how to do it without assuming students understand all of their assignments.
- Repeat questions and explanations if students do not understand.
- Provide adequate practice time.
- Synthesize ideas and demonstrate real-world relevancy, especially with fourth and fifth graders.
- Adjust teaching to the learner and the subject matter.
- Continuously monitor students whether they are low or high achievers.
- Emphasize important terms/ideas to be learned.
- Demonstrate a high degree of verbal fluency.
- Avoid vague or garbled words and phrases.
- Avoid fillers (uh, ah, um).

How Can I Get Rid of the Mazes and Those Other Horrible Things:

The editors of PAR suggest teachers might try taping instructions they planned to give to a class and analyzing them for instructional clarity. As an alternative, teachers might record actual introductions to assignments or lessons and objectively rate themselves or trade ratings with another. Try to cut down on using:

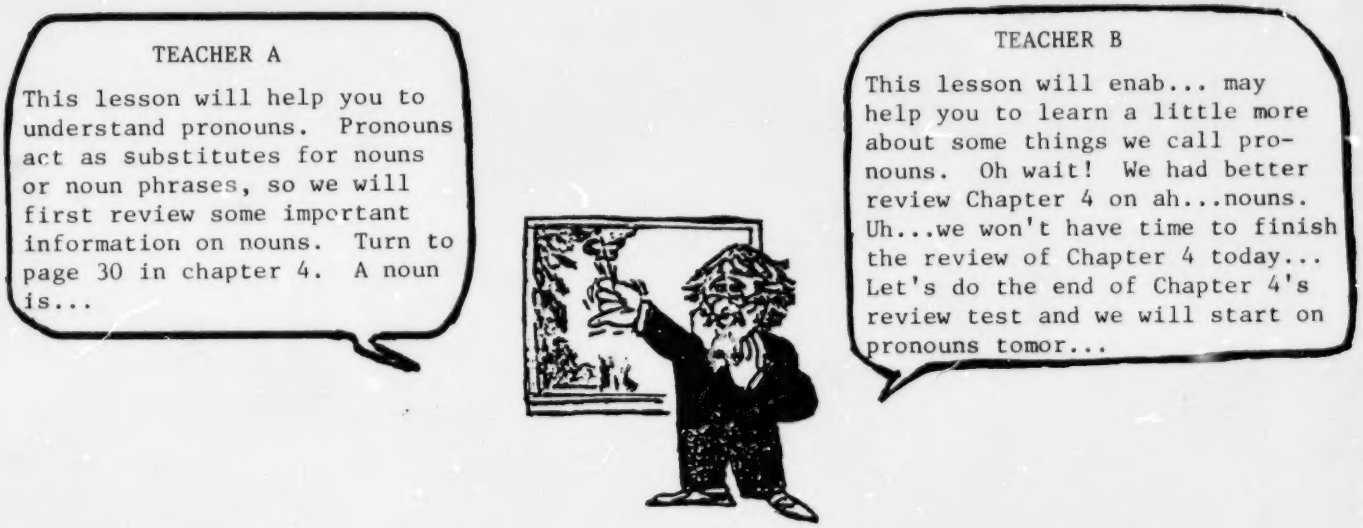
Fillers: Stammering while searching for the right words (e.g., uh, ah, um).

Vague or garbled instructions: Throwing in relevant information out of sequence as it is remembered. For example, "Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you some important background information." Or, "I should have told you to read this other material before starting this new chapter."

Inaudible pitch: Speaking too quietly at all times or speaking loudly enough most of the time but allowing the voice to drop off to an inaudible pitch on certain words or sentences.

Mazes: All the above rolled into one....Students must wade through fillers, vague and/or garbled instructions, and have Superman's auditory ability in order to figure out what should have been clear, concise instructions.

Before reviewing your own introduction, try reviewing these presentations. Instructional clarity can make a difference!


TEACHER A
This lesson will help you to understand pronouns. Pronouns act as substitutes for nouns or noun phrases, so we will first review some important information on nouns. Turn to page 30 in chapter 4. A noun is...
TEACHER B
This lesson will enab... may help you to learn a little more about some things we call pronouns. Oh wait! We had better review Chapter 4 on ah...nouns. Uh...we won't have time to finish the review of Chapter 4 today... Let's do the end of Chapter 4's review test and we will start on pronouns tomor...

Reference:

Practical Application of Research, Newsletter of Phi Delta Kappa's Center on Evaluation Development and Research, Bloomington, Indiana, 1981, 3 (3), 1-4.